

a confusing, insubstantial benefit to the majority of seniors.

If the Republicans wanted to save money, they could have put in a provision that I and many Democrats have pushed for—and that is to allow the Secretary of the HHS to negotiate with the pharmaceutical to get fairer prices for the American people. I believe that the American pharmaceuticals industry is the best in the world. They make good products that benefit the world. But Americans are now paying double the cost for drugs than their counterparts in other rich nations such as Germany, Canada, Great Britain, or Japan. I am glad our companies are making money. But as we enact a prescription drug benefit under Medicare, access to drugs will rise—and drug company profits will rise as well. It is only fair that the Secretary should have the power to negotiate a good price for American consumers, to make sure we get the best returns possible on our federal investment.

Not only did the Republicans not put in a provision to allow such negotiations, they went out of their way to forbid the Secretary from trying to get better prices for Americans. Why, because they value the profits of their corporate sponsors at Pharma, more than they do the well-being of our nation's seniors.

Similarly, the Republican plan's design wastes billions in kickbacks for HMOs—instead of using that money to bring down the premiums and out-of-pocket costs that seniors and the disabled are forced to pay.

The Republican plan is not available to everyone on Medicare. First, the House Republican plan reportedly will introduce “means-testing” for Medicare benefits—by which seniors with higher incomes would have to pay considerably more out-of-pocket before they reached the catastrophic limit. Medicare is supposed to be for all seniors, it is not welfare, just for the poor. It should be protected as such. What's more, under the Senate Republican approach, low-income seniors and Americans with disabilities would receive nothing at all—the 17 percent of medicare beneficiaries who are also eligible for Medicaid are simply left out. This misguided policy endangers coverage for millions of seniors whose fluctuating incomes change their Medicaid eligibility for year to year.

The Republican plan rolls the dice, gambling seniors' health. By relying on insurance companies to offer coverage instead of guaranteeing benefits in Medicare, the Republican approach runs the risk that no company will offer benefits to seniors in rural communities, where millions of Americans have already been abandoned by HMOs in search of bigger profits elsewhere. There are 9.2 million Medicare beneficiaries in rural areas nationwide. Eighty percent of these seniors have no access to any Medicare HMO. Only 13 percent of them have access to a Medicare HMO that offers a drug benefit. The bill we are getting glimpses of takes failed policy, and expands it to critical areas.

The Republican plan is a risky scheme only an HMO could love. The Bush Administration's Medicare Administrator has called traditional Medicare “dumb” and “a disaster,” highlighting Republicans' disdain for a program that Democrats have been fighting for since 1965. While Democrats have worked to modernize Medicare with prescription drugs, preventive care and other new benefits, Republicans are insisting on a riskier course even

the Wall Street Journal calls a business and social “experiment.”

The Republican plan destroys Employer Retiree coverage. The Congressional Budget Office has concluded that about one third of private employers will drop their retiree drug coverage under a proposal like the one being contemplated. In order to lower its costs, the House Republican plan stipulates that any dollar an employer pays for an employee's drug costs would not count towards the employee's \$3,700 out-of-pocket catastrophic cap. This would therefore disadvantage seniors with employer retiree coverage because it would be almost impossible for them to ever reach the \$3,700 catastrophic cap, over which Medicare would pay 100 percent of their drug costs. The practical effect of this is that employers will stop offering retiree coverage. That is a step in the wrong direction.

We can do better. The House Democrats' legislation, that I am a proud cosponsor of, is designed to help seniors and people with disabilities, not HMOs and the pharmaceuticals industry. Under the Democratic proposal, the new Medicare prescription drug program would be affordable for seniors and Americans with disabilities and available to all no matter where they lived. It offers a meaningful benefit with a guaranteed low premium; and would be available as a new “Medicare Part D” within the traditional Medicare program that seniors know and trust.

I am committed to getting seniors the prescription medications that their doctors deem they need. I want to work with our Colleagues on the other side of the aisle, and the Administration to make that happen. But unless I see a plan without a gap—with a consistent benefit—with some smart cost-controls—and some protections for Medicare, an excellent program for Americans, I cannot support this Republican drug scheme.

Let's do better.

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#### REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 8, DEATH TAX REPEAL PERMANENCY ACT OF 2003

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 108-157) on the resolution (H. Res. 281) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 8) to make the repeal of the estate tax permanent, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

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#### REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 1528, TAXPAYER PROTECTION AND IRS ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 2003

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 108-158) on the resolution (H. Res. 282) providing for consideration of the bill (H.R. 1528) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to protect taxpayers and ensure accountability of the Internal Revenue Service, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

#### HONORING BOB SCHROEDER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. BRADLEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a friend, Bob Schroeder, who has been named Town of Hooksett's Citizen of the Year. Bob was instrumental in the restoration and revitalization of a truly historic local, State, and national landmark.

Robie's Country Store, in Hooksett, has a lengthy history of acting as the town's gathering spot, a place to argue politics, play checkers, buy groceries and homemade baked goods. Robie's was also a required stop for local politicians and Presidential candidates visiting the first-in-the-Nation primary State for over 30 years.

The store closed in 1997, after the store's owners, Lloyd and Dorothy Robie, retired. After 5 years of dormancy, and a lack of funds and dedicated owners, Robie's Country Store reopened, continuing its 30-year political tradition and its 110-year presence in the town.

Bob Schroeder saw an imperative need to preserve this cultural and political landmark and formed the Robie's Country Store Historic Preservation Association to spearhead the renovation effort. The association has worked diligently to bring the store to life again; and on May 24, 2003, Robie's Country Store reopened to an eager and proud community.

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Bob and the Preservation Association were careful to maintain Robie's historical accuracy by keeping the 97-year old building's flooring, ceiling and picture wall of political memorabilia. Always humble, Bob refuses to take credit for the grand reopening of the store, instead pointing the spotlight on the efforts of the entire community. Under Bob's leadership, people of all ages worked together to restore Robie's through fundraising and renovation efforts. The community's hard work will undoubtedly ensure that the rich heritage and traditions of the store will remain intact for future generations to enjoy.

Bob's tireless commitment to preserving this landmark and energizing the whole community to get involved is a wonderful example of his perseverance and dedication to improving the community and State in which he lives. I can think of no better person than Bob Schroeder to receive the Hooksett Citizen of the Year Award, and I am honored to represent him and all other concerned and conscientious citizens from Hooksett and the First Congressional District of New Hampshire.

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#### TRIBUTE TO THE TOWN OF LILLINGTON

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FRANKS of Arizona). Under a previous